

# Architecture of the Evicted

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Over the last decade, an enthusiasm for the past has steadily permeated New York's aesthetic vocabulary until, at the present moment, terms such as "tradition," "preservation," indeed "history" itself, have become catchwords of the cultural practices manufacturing our built environment. Official discourses about history circulate in the specialized institutions of the professions that, collectively, are the architects of the city. Architects, planners, designers, and public artists materialize history in such recent urban programs as landmark preservation, contextual zoning, historic district simulations, neighborhood "revivals" and civic art restorations.

Rarely, however, do the projects executed under the aegis of these programs – the "renaissance" of Union Square in Lower Manhattan or of the Upper West Side, for instance – actually return their sites to an earlier, and certainly not to an "original," state. Instead, they refurbish antique details while extensively reconfiguring space in accordance with the exigencies of our own historical conjuncture. For instance, park restorations may restore existing sculptures or street furniture but redesign space as reverse panopticons – Foucauldian spatial mechanisms that permit the policing of inhabitants through principles of compulsory visibility.<sup>1</sup> Projects such as Battery Park City, exemplar of the return to convention in city planning, literally fabricate traditional neighborhoods anew.<sup>2</sup> And even when redevelopment schemes utilize old terrains and structures, as in the renewal of South Street Seaport, they also engineer wholesale change in the area's uses. Advertising campaigns in the mass media, cultural journals, real-estate brochures, and speeches by public officials try to lend an aura of authenticity to such initiatives by emphasizing the restoration of "real" historical elements. Primarily, however, they invoke a past existing only in the realm of the imaginary, eliciting from readers

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and viewers nostalgia, bound up with objects, for a flawless environment. An external “guarantee” of an equally flawless self, their image of the city is, of course, a fantasy from the start.

The preservation of this image therefore exacts a cost in representational violence: the city can only be constructed as a coherent entity by expelling the conflicts within it and, more importantly, those that produce it. Yet when the nostalgic image is bestowed on New York’s actual construction projects, its fantasy status helps those projects resist critical challenges. Accordingly, celebratory accounts of real estate- or state-sponsored architectural plans do not confine themselves to describing the historical character of individual restorations or even to suggesting that such projects reinstate the pleasures of some distant era. They intimate further that projects undertaken in the name of preservation represent advances in a struggle to restore – against disruptive forces – a model city from the more remote past, one that is harmonious in its entirety. Such a unitary urban condition, even if it never characterized New York, is said to have distinguished our heritage of earlier cities, for example, “the larger order of monumental Paris,”<sup>3</sup> London, or ancient Greece or Rome.

If a prototype cannot be found in earlier physical spaces, the desire for a harmonious environment can be further displaced onto a historicist narrative of urbanism, a story of urban planning as an attempt to produce an ideal human environment. Alluding to far-reaching restorative goals and conjuring a past that never existed, the newly conservative urban aesthetic explains its own contradictions – between, for one, its preservationist rhetoric and destructive acts. It aims, much like the modernist utopias it holds in contempt, to produce a unified spatial order, but one that, unlike modernist visions, also respects existing physical conditions – or so we are told. The preservationist outlook, then, presents itself as conservator of past and present. More, it projects a vision of the future, one foretold in the economic “renaissance” that New York purportedly experienced in the 1980s. Yet within the traditionalist perspective, the city’s architectural expansion does not appear as an effect of economic growth alone. Rather, architecture that adheres to traditional principles of planning and design is said to reflect and engender social stability.

Indeed, the historical mentality that guided the spatial and visual production of the city went hand in hand with intensified economic and social restructuring, by means of which, it is routinely held, New York recovered its balance, which had been severely shaken by the “fiscal” crisis of the mid-1970s as well as by regional racial conflicts in the late 1960s. But restructuring does not represent a neutral solution to objective problems. The reverse is closer to the truth: driven by the imperatives to facilitate capital accumulation and enhance social control, it is legitimated by prevailing *constructions* of social “realities.” The city’s redevelopment, as an aspect of broader restructuring, does extensively transform New York: not, however, into an environment that serves the needs of a monolithic body of residents but into a center for the executive functions of finance corporations and related services. It is part of a globally reordered division of labor in which multinational corporations shift productive activities and low-level clerical jobs

outside metropolitan centers, a shift that in turn alters employment patterns within cities like New York, which occupy the upper ranks of a reconstituted international urban hierarchy. Redevelopment and its residential component, gentrification, which is to say, upward changes in the class composition of neighborhoods, systematically destroy the physical conditions of survival – housing and services – for redundant blue-collar workers, while creating luxury housing, office towers, and recreational facilities to serve the new corporate workforce and tourist industries.

Gentrification also fosters gross real-estate speculation, as land is exploited for superprofits, an exploitation that is further encouraged by crises in troubled sectors of capital that encourage investment in the built environment. Since maximum profits in real estate depend on previous devalorizations of land, which creates a gap between present and potential values, the gentrification of the city is geographically, as well as economically, uneven: deterioration of low-income housing and neighborhoods sets the stage for subsequent investment for “higher,” more profitable uses. The resulting displacement of low-income residents (who are already marginalized by the loss of jobs) through direct eviction or the exclusionary conversion of neighborhoods into areas they can no longer afford is, therefore, no accidental by-product of prosperity. It is caused by the conditions of growth under advanced capitalism, which requires unevenness.

Far from a period of stability, then, the era of redevelopment entails a wrenching reorganization of the economy, changing patterns of employment, class and racial polarization, destruction of communities, and the forcible dislocation of masses of immiserated New Yorkers. Along with proliferating condominium towers, lavish corporate headquarters, convention centers, and mixed-use luxury developments – signs of New York’s prosperity – the most visible symptoms of this reorganization are abandoned apartments, deteriorating neighborhoods, and, especially, thousands of displaced homeless residents, who are the product of an urban policy that simultaneously creates and abandons responsibility for basic social needs as it responds to capital’s search for profits. And far from conserving the physical city, redevelopment threatens to change the scenery altogether. What, then, is the nature of the stability conjured by architecture as it attempts to preserve traditional appearances? How do aesthetic practices that proclaim devotion to history function within the actual historical conditions of redevelopment? How might counter-practices remake this history?

Krzysztof Wodiczko has raised and responded to these questions in a series of projects – public artworks, proposals, gallery installations – shown in New York beginning in 1984. Three slide projections – *The New Museum/Astor Building Projection* (1984) [see plate 12], *The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York* (1986), *The Real-Estate Projection* (1988) – as well as the ongoing *Homeless Vehicle Project*, first exhibited in 1988, deal directly with real estate and housing and establish their importance to New York’s aesthetic landscape. The first three works consisted of images projected onto the surfaces of buildings or sculptures in Lower Manhattan neighborhoods that have been targeted for redevelopment: Lower Broadway,

Union Square, the Lower East Side [see plate 12]. The subject matter of Wodiczko's images connected the architectural structures to their surrounding areas and, by virtue of attention to social concerns, revealed that these areas were immersed in broader spatial situations.

Only by recognizing that the effects of redevelopment in individual urban spaces are not circumscribed but radiate outward and that redevelopment projects are part of larger, indeed global, spatial patterns can we discern, beneath the appearance that gentrification is random and spontaneous, its systematic character and extensive proportions. But to fully analyze restructuring, our field of vision cannot simply be widened to encompass lateral extensions of physical space; it must also expand conceptually to perceive space as social, as, that is, an economic, political, and cultural construction. Since the late 1960s, critical urban theorists have adopted an approach to the urban object that integrates spatial and social relations. During the same years, the dimensions of aesthetic thought have expanded in similar directions: criticism has positioned art objects geographically, which is to say, within broader spaces, and has also spatialized the art object itself by treating it as a social relationship itself. Wodiczko combines insights from the two fields in his urban-aesthetic practice. Relating art and architecture to urban conditions, he does not merely stretch the boundaries of art by placing "inside" buildings and institutions images of socio-spatial issues purported to lie "outside." Rather, he investigates how the outside always resides within, constituted by and, at the same time constituting, not simply influencing, the identities of institutions. The manner in which his projected images infiltrate physical surfaces, dissolving yet calling attention to the boundaries of architectural or spatial structures, gives literal form to the ambiguous status of the line that divides interior and exterior.

Each of Wodiczko's Lower Manhattan projections explored a network of spatial relations by examining the function of specific cultural institutions – museum, art gallery, public art – in the mechanism of gentrification. The New Museum of Contemporary Art, site of the artist's 1984 projection, is an exhibition space occupying the ground floor of the Astor Building on Lower Broadway. Inserted into the building and into the gentrifying district, however, the New Museum itself is an exhibition. It displays to future luxury tenants the high-status as well as high-income character of the area. More, the museum creates an image of redevelopment as a whole, legitimating it as a positive force that brings cultural benefits to all New Yorkers. Likewise, in the 1980s, East Village art galleries both elevated property values and legitimated gentrification on the Lower East Side, imparting at the same time a Bohemian atmosphere to the area that encouraged a disavowal of social conditions.<sup>4</sup> The restoration of Union Square Park and its four neoclassical sculptures, the centerpiece of Union Square gentrification, provided the same aesthetic alibi for the economic interests benefiting from that area's redevelopment. "High culture" performs these economic and ideological functions effectively, since, presupposed to lie outside socio-material conditions, it merges populist and elitist sentiments. Its presence establishes proof of a wealthy neighborhood's

“real” elite status and, at the same time, offers evidence of redevelopment’s public accountability, even “democratic” character.

When, however, utilizing techniques of slide projection and montage, Wodiczko infiltrated the surfaces of physical structures embodying “culture” with images alluding to the social consequences of gentrification, he challenged the idealist separation of aesthetics from the material conditions of its existence. He focused the images on concrete art institutions: locks and chains on the warehoused Astor Building and the New Museum; windows with a view of devastated low-income apartment houses on the walls of a renovated Lower East Side gallery; the attributes and tools of survival of homeless residents on the Union Square monuments. But because the images eroded the rigid dualisms erected by idealist aesthetics, they challenged art *as* an institution: a mode of production and reception, discursive formation, and signifying practice.

In this respect, the recent New York projections pursued the aims that unite all the projections Wodiczko has engineered since 1979. As a description of Wodiczko’s practice, the word “projection” refers first to the process of exhibiting slides on a screen, in this case, on the surfaces of buildings, spaces, or monuments. “Projection” has multiple definitions, however, and denotes more than a technical procedure. It describes, for instance, a symbolic operation by which concepts are visualized as external realities and, further, a rhetorical device for speaking with clarity at a distance. In these senses, projection refers to the procedural dimension of language. Indeed, the success of Wodiczko’s work depends on the degree to which it disrupts the seeming naturalness of the built environment – its appearance of simply being there – and mobilizes in its audience an awareness that the architecture on which it projects images is not merely a collection of beautiful or functional objects but, rather, a set of signifying objects transmitting messages about the meaning of the city. The very existence of such messages depends on the presence of spectators who receive them. To counteract architecture’s conventional rhetoric, Wodiczko’s projections must therefore disengage viewers from habitual modes of perceiving and inhabiting the city, of passively receiving its messages. They must reposition viewers so as to alter the nature of social space. Calling attention to and manipulating architecture’s language, Wodiczko’s works disrupt the city’s speech. They do not only interfere with the conscious perceptions of sociologically defined spectators; they also subvert the fantasy projections of viewing subjects, who, through the modes of identification solicited by traditional architecture, “ensure” an imaginary self-coherence by looking at naturalized images of the city. Wodiczko’s performances are, then, projections onto projections.

Architectural representations gain their authority and seeming inevitability either by denying that they speak at all or by disavowing the social and psychical mechanisms through which meaning is produced by and attributed to physical objects. Within a functionalist perspective, instrumental purpose – the mere fulfillment of “natural needs” – is believed to be the only meaning signified by the built environment. In the image of the utilitarian city constructed by functionalism, the city speaks for itself. Aestheticism, by contrast, holds that the visual components

of the city – monuments, buildings, parks, artworks – contain inherent, fixed and autonomous aesthetic meaning. The “beautiful city” by definition has no social function other than the ahistorical one of nourishing the transcendent inner visions of the unchanging human spirit. Yet another point of view openly celebrates the symbolism of urban objects but believes that they express values and beliefs adhered to by a unitary society. All these idealist notions, projected *onto* architecture, disavow the social production of meaning. When in turn they are projected *by* architecture they are instrumental in securing consent to urban political processes such as, most recently, redevelopment. Environments shaped by the particular interests of profit and control appear to be determined by the universal interests of utility, beauty and truth.

To challenge the authority of architecture Wodiczko’s projections disrupt the apparent naturalness and homogeneity of its speech. Like the image of the flawless city, unruptured by conflicts or differences, the image of symbolic structures as embodiments of social cohesion can only be built by repressing the relations of domination that have produced them as symbols of unity. Current uses of neoclassical buildings and monuments illustrate the process. Nineteenth-century municipal art movements placed such structures in United States cities as part of an attempt to establish social order and conceal contradictions because neoclassical aesthetic codes signified tradition, order, timelessness and moral perfection.<sup>5</sup> Today, redevelopment projects capitalize on earlier connotations when they refurbish neoclassical monuments, projecting new meanings onto old structures that survive in transformed conditions.

In Union Square, for example, to provide amenities to subsidize the area’s luxury development, city government restored Union Square Park and its four sculptural monuments. They carried out the restoration in the name of a return to the traditional city. Like all redevelopment schemes, Union Square “revitalization” added untold numbers of people to the ranks of the city’s homeless population through exclusionary displacement. Further, the park renovation tried to remove the homeless who already resided in the park. Given the goals and effects of Union Square redevelopment, the neoclassical statues and the park itself can only be presented as symbols of redevelopment’s preservation of shared, enduring values through suppression. The relations that produced the monuments in their new incarnation – real estate, private property, the commodity form of housing provision – and the most dire consequence of these relations – homelessness – must be constituted as categories distinct from gentrification. The homeless must therefore be evicted not only from redeveloped spaces but also from the image of redevelopment.

However, it is not necessary to eliminate the visible evidence of homelessness to bring about this repression. Visibility has ambiguous and multiple effects. While it can create legitimization problems for local government, it can promote a disciplinary agenda to ward off demands from the poor.<sup>6</sup> The repression of redevelopment’s contradictions does require that the links between homelessness and the city’s transformation be severed on the register of appearances. Massive propaganda



campaigns about alcohol, mental illness, and drug-related reasons for homelessness effect this separation when they represent such “causes” as distinct from housing issues or as themselves unrelated to the city’s redevelopment. So does former Parks Commissioner Henry Stern’s contention, in support of regulations that bar the homeless from using city parks for survival needs, that the parks cannot “solve” the homeless problem. This defense denies the fact that, as a major facet of redevelopment, the gentrification of city parks produces homelessness.

Wodiczko counteracts the suppression of social conflicts in architectural images of redevelopment by projecting back onto gentrified structures counter-images alluding to conflicts. His Union Square project (see Figure 16.1), for instance, was a proposal to project onto the façades of the park monuments attributes of the homeless – their tools of survival – so that the figurative sculptures themselves would appear to be evicted. Visualizing the absences on which the traditional image of redevelopment is structured, Wodiczko’s projects are genuine acts of architectural restoration: they reinstate the memory of events and people expelled in the construction of stable meanings. Integrated with the architecture, Wodiczko’s images heal the breaches created by violent expulsions, especially as the absences remain visible on the monuments, lingering in viewers’ memories after the slide machines are switched off.

Consequently, Wodiczko’s projections accommodate themselves to the architectural syntax of the buildings they criticize, manipulating them from within.



**Figure 16.1** Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Proposal for Union Square*, 1986. © Krzysztof Wodiczko, Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York.

By doing so the images force spectators' attention to the structures' own language. Formal congruence between image and architecture also renders the projection more astonishing as excluded material returns within the familiar vehicles of its expulsion. The surprise engendered by this uncanny impression alters the viewer's relation to urban objects. For if dominant representations imprint their messages on receivers through an immediate identification with an image so "natural" it seems to be uncoded, Wodiczko's transformed images have the opposite effect: they impede one-way communication and, restoring memories, require us to critically read the environment, fostering the creative consumption of the city.

As New York redevelops and its contradictions deepen, the necessity for such readings has become more urgent and the conditions for developing critical urban practices more complicated than ever before. In the face of an urban situation whose ramifications are only now becoming manifest Wodiczko has engaged in a new work called *The Homeless Vehicle Project*.<sup>7</sup> This work radically amplifies the strategies employed in the projections but adapts them to confront redevelopment's threat to occupy space entirely. *The Homeless Vehicle Project* (see Figure 16.2) is a projection in the sense of a plan, a proposal to produce a vehicle designed by Wodiczko in consultation with homeless men. Designed to aid residents who make a living by collecting cans and bottles to be exchanged for deposits, the vehicle would also enhance the ability of this group of homeless people to live, work and move through the streets of New York. The project is, then, an action supporting the right of evicted residents to resist relegation to intolerable shelters and to the city's periphery. It legitimates the status of these residents as members of the urban community.

Preliminary presentations of the vehicle have utilized the discursive forms of architectural and planning – drawings, models, photomontages – to picture the object's effect on the existing city. When the vehicle circulates in the parks, streets and spaces of the city itself, however, it actualizes these preliminary projections, creating a tension between its practical and symbolic functions, which cannot be pried apart. Like the artist's slide projections, the *Homeless Vehicle Project* disrupts the official architecture of the city, but its mobility extends the work's context to urban space as a whole, defining architecture as the city itself. This wider geographical network is the work's potential site. As a tool with which those evicted by redevelopment can pursue their daily lives, the *Homeless Vehicle Project* is also, then, a weapon in a struggle waged by residents to appropriate a city dominated by profit and state interventions. As a symbolic and temporary weapon, however, it does not offer itself as a solution for the homeless but helps elucidate the mechanisms by which space is dominated and the domination resisted.

Critical challenges to redevelopment stem from the recognition that in addition to an economic restructuring, New York's transformation tries to reconcile social contradictions by refortifying a spatial hierarchy. The arrangement of redeveloped space is not determined by inevitable evolutions – technological, biological, organic, or social. Neither does it fulfill the natural needs of individuals aggregated



in cities. Such essential views of urban organization perform a political function by obstructing the perception that the forms, uses and meanings assigned to space fulfill the needs of specific societies structured on relations of power. The construction of the city, then, is conflictual, not uniform, and its conflicts are political, not inevitable. As Henri Lefebvre says, space is a social product, an arena for the reproduction of social relations and itself a social relation. New York's present restructuring perpetuates the production of a distinctive historical space: an economic and political space both of which "converge," in the words of Lefebvre, "toward the elimination of all differences."<sup>8</sup>

Homogenization – of space, history, culture, and society – characterizes all facets of the redevelopment process. Restructuring strives to create in New York's physical environment a condition that Paul Feyerabend, referring to international tendencies toward the destruction of cultural variety, calls a "brave new monotony."<sup>9</sup> The global conquest of differences that Feyerabend considers the distinguishing feature of the contemporary world and that Lefebvre sees as the key feature of the spatial exercise of power is manifested in New York. Homogenization takes place forcibly when social groups are literally expelled from the city. It also works discursively by inscribing the absence of groups in representations of the city. Further, it functions ideologically, neutralizing antagonisms among competing visions of the city by substituting arbitrary differences or simple dualisms for genuine conflicts. These homogenizing procedures consolidate the city as territory, constructing a domain over which power is exercised by controlling relations of inclusion/exclusion and presence/absence.

For Lefebvre, the homogenization of space produces an economic and political geography serving the dual, sometimes conflicting, interests of profit and state control. In accordance with the general leveling tendencies of capitalism, spatial production fragments land into interchangeable units that can be exchanged as a commodity – real estate – and, contradictorily, organizes space into vast networks that function efficiently as force of production within a world economy. The exploitation of space by tourist and leisure businesses also has a homogenizing effect since such industries preserve diversities only insofar as they are generalized from the specific social realities of inhabitants and reconstituted as objects of consumption. Abstracting space from subjects in multiple ways, the relations of spatial production under advanced capitalism withdraw from users of space the power to control its production. So does government domination of urban planning and architecture. New York is thus alienated from its users by various means: the private property relation through which it is owned as land and appropriated for profit; the privatization and bureaucratization of land-use decisions; technocratic city planning that produces space as an external framework into which people are passively inserted; inequitable distribution of spatial resources by government agencies; planning decisions that construct a city racially, economically, and functionally segregated into centers of wealth and decision-making power insulated from impoverished and voiceless peripheries.

As a result, the production of New York both literally deterritorializes huge numbers of residents and causes public space to atrophy into private or state-controlled areas that tolerate little resistance to approved uses. These deterritorializations destroy the material ground of public life even as the provision of “public” space by redevelopment projects continues to be heralded as a triumph for the public. Redeveloped public spaces legitimate and provide amenities for profitable investment.<sup>10</sup> What is threatened with extinction in New York is not government involvement in the production of space, as some critics believe. Rather, the nature of that production undermines the conditions for situating a public sphere – at once a concrete spatial form and a social arena of democratic political debate. “The public sphere is in this sense what one might call the factory of politics – its site of production,” writes Alexander Kluge, proposing the establishment of a public sphere that opposes the exclusionary rights of private property and state control.<sup>11</sup> To illuminate the present dangers posed to such an arena, Kluge compares today’s loss of a public sphere with the appropriation of common land by feudal lords:

The loss of land also means a loss of community because if there is no land on which the farmers may assemble, it is no longer possible to develop a community. The same thing is happening again, on a historically higher plane, in people’s heads when they are deprived of the public sphere.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, redevelopment is a twofold program. It homogenizes and deterritorializes. New York’s homeless are evictees in a broad sense: refugees from the city’s transformation. They are expelled from homes, communities, parks, the economy, the city and society. Because homogenization of conflicting concerns can only be brought about through exclusions, redevelopment is structured on relations of eviction by means of which its stability comes into existence. For this reason, the architecture of redevelopment does not transparently reveal the city’s social stability. Its defenders are right: it has real social effects. It assumes, for one thing, the task of maintaining ideological stability. The preservationist aesthetic is ideally suited to this job because, under its direction, architecture can fulfill capitalism’s need to continuously change the built environment and yet explain those disruptions in terms of enduring values. Moreover, by evoking the nostalgic image of the coherent city, the preservationist outlook presents disruptions as the essential precondition for reestablishing harmony. The paradoxical admission that enduring tradition is vulnerable to extinction justifies attacks on, even the elimination of, those groups that contest the values represented by the dominant city. The traditional city is, therefore, a picture of society as a harmonious “we” who hold eternal values. But since the image of a monolithic society depends on controlling differences, New York’s “restoration” becomes an act of “reclaiming” the city from those it marginalizes<sup>13</sup>

History in New York, as in other areas, is, then, less a process of memory than an attempt to forget. More precisely, the architecture of redevelopment constructs



Figure 16.2 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Homeless Vehicle* in New York City, 1988–9. Krzysztof Wodiczko, Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York.

the built environment as a medium, one we literally inhabit, that monopolizes popular memory by controlling the representation of its own history. It is an evicting architecture. Not only is it sponsored by economic and political forces bent on expulsion, confinement, and ghettoization, and not only does it relinquish responsibility for basic needs; it also attempts to direct the representation of social life by silencing conflicts and rendering entire social groups absent from the city. One can easily detect who is consigned to oblivion and who is addressed as the subject of a unitary city in media constructions that debate whether or not the homeless are “ordinary, middle-class folks” and “people like us.” The exclusionary gesture is equally clear when, in an article designed to comfort New Yorkers by praising the virtues of new “public” benefits, we read:

New Yorkers suddenly can't seem to find anything good to say about their city. ... Beggars stalk the sidewalks, prices keep soaring, the homeless are everywhere ... and it still takes four months to get a seat at *The Phantom of the Opera*.<sup>14</sup>

“In some cases,” the author of this statement adds, the “renewal” he celebrates “has pushed out longtime tenants and businesses.”<sup>15</sup> But this caveat, the obligatory mention of displacement, only intensifies the effects of disingenuous portrayals of gentrification and redevelopment as the sources of civic “improvements.” Evictions are not unfortunate by-products of actions undertaken for the general good. Such depictions conceal the structural link between

homelessness and redevelopment, perpetuating the causes of New York's worst problems by portraying them as solutions.

Despite the repressive mechanisms that dominate current constructions of the city, space continues to be appropriated for purposes of daily life as people live and work in the city from which they have been evicted. As Lefebvre argued, the city that homogenizes differences produces them in the process. Resistance to the spread of abstract space springs from this contradiction. For Lefebvre, meaning is invented in the processes of everyday life, and since social space is always situated – never existing independently of material forms – the space of everyday life, which counters real estate and state space, contains the potential for social criticism as it reasserts itself in the dominated space. This informs the approach to space adopted by Wodiczko in the *Homeless Vehicle Project*, which, helping the marginalized survive in the streets they already inhabit, connects homelessness to the contradictions inherent in the city's transformation. Against an evicting architecture, the *Homeless Vehicle* calls for, rather than provides, an architecture of the evicted. Given current forms of urbanism, such an oppositional construction of the city demands attention to social needs against the needs of profit. It supports the production of a democratic public space that, in Claude Lefort's words, is "large enough to accommodate only those who recognize one another within it and who give it a meaning."<sup>16</sup> Oppositional urban proposals also defend the production of space by users against the imposition of abstract space and attempt to meet differences in relations other than those of conquest. Aesthetic practices engaged in this struggle for an improved environment speak with, not about, marginalized members of the urban community and create representations countering the meanings projected onto the city by real-estate and state aesthetics.

Routinely, now, we are assaulted with these projections. Optimistic statements remind us of municipal "improvements." Invariably, they praise urban places built under the aegis of the historical aesthetic – park revivals, landmark preservations and neighborhood restorations. Without exception, they mobilize a historicist version of history marked by the same desire for unity as the image of a cohesive city they defend: history as the invariant survival of common traditions, an idealist narrative of cultural progress, the evolution of a homogenous society. For them, the city, as an expression of urban history, achieves its form in constant battle against the "inevitable" disruptions attendant on the need to harmonize the differences characterizing any society. Within such a writing of history, the existence of disturbing urban conditions – homelessness, for one – comes as something of a surprise; it appears to be inconsistent with our advanced stage of social, technological and cultural development. Unable to explain this condition as the product of political relations, adherents of historicism may, from a conservative point of view, see homelessness as proof of the inherent inferiority of particular individuals and groups, or, from a liberal humanist one, of the astonishing, yet persistent, inhumanity of which we still remain capable. Yet, as Walter Benjamin observed in 1940 about the latter response when it was adopted toward barbaric events in Nazi Germany, "the current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still'

possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical” nor is it “the beginning of knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Given the historical causes of homelessness in our social relations of exploitation, property, and difference, and given the concrete urban events of the last twenty years – social service cutbacks, subsidies for luxury and corporate development, mass evictions – homelessness, in fact, comes as no surprise. It is, rather, a predictable outcome, which is not to deny how shocking it is to those who find themselves without homes. For now, as in Benjamin’s day, “The state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule.”<sup>18</sup> Discarding official tradition and learning instead from “the tradition of the oppressed,” Benjamin held that “we must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.”<sup>19</sup>

Today, the view of history that disavows injustice as a structural, rather than exceptional, feature of our society, is commemorated in a built environment that makes homelessness appear to be a surprise by attempting to conceal the actual shocks produced by the city’s transformation. This history is intentionally embodied, for instance, in old civic monuments. Responding, more than a hundred years ago, to another state-imposed urban metamorphosis – Baron Haussmann’s renovation of Second Empire Paris – members of the Paris Commune attacked such univocal constructions when, attaining to a revolutionary conception of history, they demolished one of these monuments, the Vendome Column, pronouncing it “a monument to barbarism ... a permanent insult to the vanquished by the victors.”<sup>20</sup> But the Commune recognized that the spatial configuration of Paris itself was also such a monument, concretizing the victories of powerful sectors within a divided French society. They set about to demolish this monument as well, leveling the spatial hierarchy produced by Haussmann’s city plan. “Class division is also the division of the city into active and passive zones, into privileged places where decisions are made in secret, and places where these decisions are executed afterwards,” writes Kristin Ross, describing the production of the dominated space against which the Commune rebelled:

The rise of the bourgeoisie throughout the nineteenth century was inscribed on the city of Paris in the form of Baron Haussmann’s architectural and social reorganization, which gradually removed workers from the center of the city to its northeastern peripheries.<sup>21</sup>

The Commune, as Ross, following Lefebvre, interprets it, represented an appropriation of that space:

The workers’ redescend into the center of Paris followed in part from the political significance of the city center within a tradition of popular insurgency, and in part from their desire to reclaim the public space from which they had been expelled, to reoccupy streets that once were theirs.<sup>22</sup>

Haussmann’s restructuring is echoed in current efforts to shape New York into a segregated and polarized city. Yet awareness of this transformation is mediated



for New Yorkers by the physical environment it produces. Presided over by the architecture of redevelopment, that environment throws a blanket of amnesia over urban history. It is constructed, as Wodiczko puts it, "in gross contradiction to the lived experience, communicative needs and rights of most of society."<sup>23</sup> Seen in light of a tradition of urban resistance, Wodiczko's projections onto the city's gentrified monuments and buildings revive, under changed conditions, the symbolic battle waged during the Commune against architectural representations of power. Visualizing the events those representations repress – eviction – the projections reveal that municipal monuments intending to memorialize the city's stability, in fact, commemorate its barbarism. The *Homeless Vehicle*, too, preserves such symbolic strategies but bases them on the insight, also gained during the Commune, that the physical city is as much a monument as individual structures within the city, if, to borrow a term from Alois Riegl, an "unintentional" one.<sup>24</sup> A landmark of history, the spatial organization of New York commemorates urban events, constituting, just as intentional monuments do, "a permanent insult to the vanquished by the victors." Applying architectural principles to an object designed to support the activities of the evicted, the *Homeless Vehicle Project* projects onto the city the condition of a monument and, like Wodiczko's other New York works, projects onto this monument, the social contradictions of the city. When Wodiczko restores to visibility the absences structuring intentional and unintentional monuments, he forces them to acknowledge what they never intended to: the impossibility of their stability.

## Notes

- For a discussion of this kind of park renovation, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection and the Site of Urban 'Revitalization,'*" in Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
- 2 For an account of Battery Park City, see "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," in Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*.
- 3 Paul Goldberger, "Can Architects Serve the Public Good?" *New York Times*, June 25, 1989, p. H1.
- 4 Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October* 31 (winter 1984): 91–111.
- 5 M. Christine Boyer's *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983) analyzes the use of neoclassical architecture by American municipal art movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 6 Kim Hopper and Jill Hamberg suggest that current housing policies are part of such a disciplinary agenda in their "The Making of America's Homeless: From Skid Row to New Poor, 1945–1984," in Rachel Bratt, Chester Hartman, and Ann Meyerson (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Housing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pp. 12–40.
- 7 This project is discussed in greater detail in Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City."
- 8 Henri Lefebvre, "Space: Social Product and Use Value," in J. W. Freiberg (ed.), *Critical Sociology: European Perspectives* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1979), pp. 285–95.
- 9 Paul Feyerabend, "Cultural Pluralism or Brave New Monotony," in *Farewell to Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 1987), pp. 273–9.
- 10 For a discussion of the uses of the "public" in apologies for redevelopment, see Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City."